

# solidarity

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10p

# TWO STRUGGLES

Two recent industrial struggles stand in stark contrast. One is the Grunwick strike, with its allied solidarity actions. The other is the initiative of the Lucas Aerospace shop stewards.

## GRUNWICK : A 19th CENTURY DISPUTE

At the centre of all the razamatazz is a strike of heavily exploited, initially non-unionised, largely immigrant workers who wanted a sacked colleague reinstated, an end to compulsory overtime, better ventilation, the option of a holiday during the summer months, less insulting and arbitrary attitudes on the part of foremen and managers, and an unspecified increase in their near-starvation wages. It has escalated into a battle over union recognition involving a mobilisation of the 'left' and of sections of the trade union movement.

Of course we support the strikers. They are seeking to control a little more of their working lives. Their courage and tenacity have been impressive. Dockers and Heathrow Airport workers have shown solidarity. For three weeks Cricklewood postmen refused to handle Grunwick mail. They were suspended by the Post Office, and only voted to return to normal working (and this by the narrowest of majorities: 54-48) under tremendous pressure from 'their' officials. These actions have shown employers throughout the country that working class solidarity - in the Britain of 1977 - is still, potentially, the nightmare they always feared.

Many will say things like this. But let's look below the surface. The 'support' the strikers have been getting provides us with a cross-section of the contradictions, manipulations, schizoid thinking and well-meant humbug that can be found today in the 'socialist' and trade union movement. The attitude of the employers is also revealing; it is equally riddled with cant and double-talk.

### a) THE EMPLOYERS

The tenacity of the Grunwick management cannot be explained solely in terms of economic expediency. Other firms, both larger and smaller, have 'allowed the union in' without automatically collapsing. In fact, what an APEX (1) implementation might have gained (in terms of wages and conditions, over a long period) has probably already been conceded by the management - if only for propaganda purposes. What is at stake for Grunwick is the maintenance of a given pattern of authority relations within their plant. 'Who is boss here?' seems their main concern. In this their attitude is not

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(1) Association of Professional, Executive, Clerical and Computer Staff.



unique. Certain managements would quite literally prefer to close factories down rather than continue operations with their authority reduced or constantly challenged. How big is the iceberg, of which this obsession with authority is the visible tip? How many employers, in their heart of hearts, identify with Grunwick?

The fact is that the employers are by no means unanimous. Some applaud privately but few do so in public. The behaviour of the Grunwick management is undoubtedly an embarrassment to those more far-sighted capitalists who see the unions not as a threat, but as essential allies in the maintenance of labour discipline. The Confederation of British Industries has carefully avoided giving public encouragement to Mr Ward. Tory spokesmen, keen to avoid appearing as 'union bashers' (which they see as an electoral liability) have concentrated their impotent anger on the 'illegality' of mass pickets, or on the solidarity action of the postmen.

What the Grunwick management have done, though, is to puncture a vast balloon of pretence. They have called the bluff of the liberals and the social democrats. They have shown that the noises of the left are so much piss and wind. They have shown that 'reports' and 'recommendations' in a capitalist democracy have 'weight' only insofar as everyone plays the game, internalises (or pretends to internalise) the rules of the system. They have monumentally demystified the situation. They have shown that, as far as employers are concerned, both state and unions only have velvet fists in their iron gloves.

b) THE UNIONS

The anti-working class division of labour, here, worked to perfection. Each did his share of the dirty work. We are not suggesting this was consciously orchestrated, or part of a great conspiracy. Just that the various roles dovetailed very nicely.

The 'right wing' urge reliance on the capitalist courts, on the 'moral' pressure that will be exerted - in the fullness of time - on the Grunwick management. Things drag on. Grunwick seek to have declared null and void an ACAS (Advisory Conciliation and Arbitration Service) report recommending that APEX be recognised. The Lord Chief Justice rules against Grunwick. The Court of Appeal then rescinds Lord Widgery's verdict. ACAS now trots off to the House of Lords. Meanwhile: 'Cool it, brothers and sisters'. The Scarman Court of Enquiry - whose judgments are not legally binding either - meanwhile seeks to 'ascertain the facts'. 'Freeze it, friends', till they too have reported.

The UPW (Union of Post Office Workers) does all it can to prevent solidarity action from spreading among postmen, spontaneously refusing to handle the Grunwick mail. The first blacking almost succeeds (in Grunwick's own admission). The union leaders plead with the Post Office to refrain from 'provocative' action, i.e. from sacking the men. 'In exchange' the UPW will circumscribe the action to the Cricklewood depot - all the better eventually to scuttle it. Grunwick resort to provocations. But is it likely

the local UPW officials knew nothing when the Post Office allowed the firm to collect 64 bags of mail in a private, unmarked van from the Cricklewood Post office, on the afternoon of Saturday, July 23? The police certainly knew. So shabby are the UPW manoeuvres that Norman Stagg (Deputy General Secretary) is denied access to branch meetings. This does not prevent him from using the big stick. On Friday, July 22 postal workers, summoned to Conway Hall, are threatened with withdrawal of hardship money, withdrawal of union protection should the employers sack them, and even suspension from the union.

The APEX leaders, 'struggling' for union recognition within the factory, are a similar shower. Roy Grantham and his cronies do all they can to smother the struggle from within. They fight consistently... to limit the size of the mass picket. They oppose the Strike Committee's call for a second mass demonstration on August 8. They too threaten withdrawal of strike pay should the Committee proceed with its plans. Like frightened mice they run back and forth between Whitehall and TUC headquarters. The government and the TUC are scared stiff of escalation. APEX will convey the message to 'their' striking members.

The TU 'left' plays a pathetic role. Much publicised - and much photographed - parades outside the Grunwick gates allow every tired official, whose radical image needs a revamp, to have a field day. After torrents of meaningless rhetoric about solidarity, the 'left' led a march away from the factory gates, on the one day (Monday, July 11) when a genuine mass mobilisation (20,000 people perhaps) could really have kept out the scabs ... or even taken the factory over.

#### c) THE GROUPS

Members of 'revolutionary' groups are there, on the picket line, for a variety of motives: out of genuine solidarity, because they want to fight the police, to sell their papers, to recruit, because they don't want to be seen not to be providing as many bodies as their rivals. The pervasive politics of their support runs something like this: 'the capitalist class are attacking the Labour Movement and its right to organise. The trade unions are in danger. Grunwick is a crucially important test case, which has to be won by the workers'. From here on forcing union recognition on Grunwick becomes the issue. The original demands of the strikers are swept under the carpet (it will be interesting to see how many of them are 'remembered' when the final 'historic compromise' is achieved). Outside the gates there is hardly any criticism of the unions as such, of how they divide workers. There is only criticism of this or that action of this or that trade union leader or Labour politician. This implies that the Len Murrays, the Audrey Wisers, etc., together with every full-time union official with a radical phrase in his head, are somehow on the same side as the strikers. To criticise is 'divisive'.



d) THE REAL ISSUES

Such a view can only help hide all the dirty work going on. We see things quite differently. Modern capitalism has learned to live very comfortably with trade unions - and vice versa. The struggle for socialism goes on within the unions, not through them. Autonomous action by groups of workers in unions is de-fused, squashed, denounced or pissed on from a great height by the full-time officials (and by some of the lay officials too). Socialism is about people acting for themselves, on a massive scale. It is most emphatically not about taking orders, or being bullied into actions that every class instinct tells one are wrong.

For us the positive content of the Grunwick struggle lies in the initiatives of the strikers to spread the strike. It is in the workers' resistance to Grantham, of APEX, when he ordered the end to mass picketing. (Incidentally, defending APEX as if one was defending socialism is hilarious. APEX was expelled from the TUC, at one point, because of its attitude to the Industrial Relations Bill. It also proscribed the SWP - called IS at the time.) It was great when the Cricklewood Post Office workers continued to black Grunwick mail, although instructed not to by their 'leader' Jackson. Even better was the way that these workers, once suspended, continued to work at sorting and delivering mail (until locked out) - with the exception of Grunwick's. There was socialism, too, in the genuine solidarity of the picket line.

Union bureaucracies use the threat of mass action as a bargaining lever. This will only work if the lever can be seen to stop mass action as well as start it. The potential power of the unions is real and massive: confrontations between government and unions can today result in a defeated government, as Mr Heath learned to his cost. It is obvious that Grunwick could be quickly closed down by concerted action. Trade union leaders are doing everything to stop this developing. This is not because they want to see the Grunwick strikers defeated, though this will probably be the result. Nor is it, to any great extent, out of fear of taking 'illegal' action or of prejudicing good relations with the Labour government - though the vote-losing image of militancy on the picket line is very much in the mind of the Labour politicians. Overwhelmingly it is a fear of losing control. The day-to-day business of blacking Grunwick work has already involved close contact between the Strike Committee and postal workers - cutting out the middle men. The more the blacking develops the more this parallel organisation grows ...and the more the bureaucrats are cut out. Behind the rhetoric of support by the full-time officials is the constant concern to assert control over 'their' members, a control which, once achieved, means the effective demobilisation of the rank and file.

It is doubtful whether the Grunwick dispute can be won by mere ritualised picketing. The 'concessions' gained on the picket line effectively deny the strikers any chance of stopping the coaches which daily bring in

# LUCAS AEROSPACE

One of us recently talked with a convenor of a Lucas Aerospace factory about the initiative that his Shop Stewards Combine had recently taken. Some of our readers may be familiar with the details but for those who are not here's what it's about.

The Stewards Combine have proposed a shift from Defence to 'socially useful' production. They want this linked with a breakdown of the managerial hierarchy in the factories. These wide-ranging demands originated in a struggle against redundancies which the firm had proposed. The stewards felt that protest action or rearguard defence - by occupation or systematic blacking for example - did not have a very good track record. It seemed to make sense, if only from a propaganda point of view, to suggest alternative projects for Lucas' unused capacity. But these proposals gathered a momentum of their own.

An approach was made to people in the Alternative Technology movement. This didn't turn out to be particularly useful. One naive group in Leeds set up a seminar for the stewards but didn't tell them that it had also invited the management, with whom the workers were in dispute at the time! More generally it wasn't a case of this kind of ineptitude. It was the do-it-yourself, alternative technologists having their minds boggled by the capacity and technological sophistication of the Lucas empire. It was like a child being given a toy too big to play with. With one or two exceptions the Combine had to work out its ideas by itself.

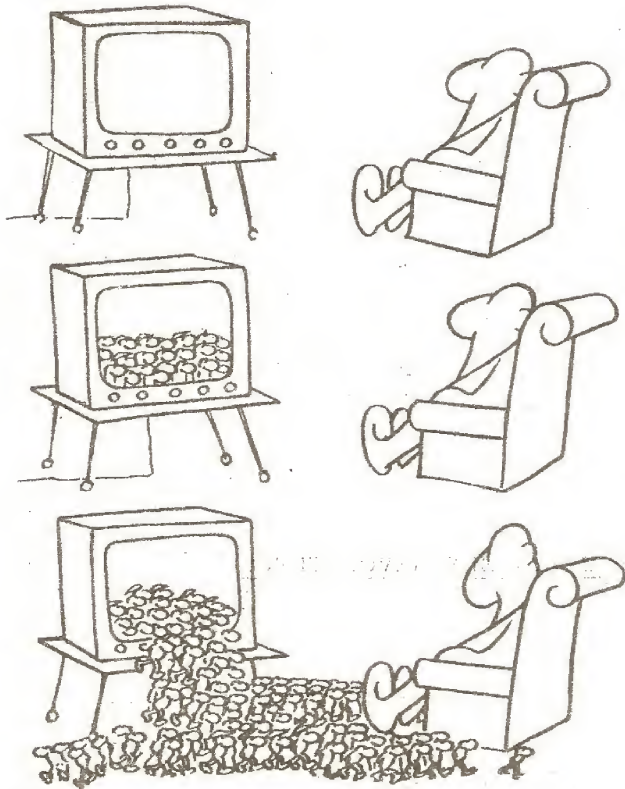
It concentrated on three projects: heat pumps, kidney machines, and a hybrid car. (This has a petrol engine, working at constant revs, which charges a battery which actually drives the car. This arrangement allows highly efficient fuel use, and creates much less pollution and noise.) There was much discussion and detailed technical feasibility studies were drawn up. These discussions were carried on within the combine in a democratic way. Parallel sets of proposals were well received. The proposed development and production teams were composed of democratic groupings of administrative, design, skilled and unskilled workers, instead of the present hierarchical heap. (The proposals were in fact drafted by one of the effective 'alternative technologists'.)

Within the Combine there were difficulties. Representatives of the design technicians (officially 'staff') saw things at times in a very 'wide perspective' and would invite the older, more traditional type of worker to condemn, for instance, the Agee/Hosenball expulsions. Some felt this to be 'external' to their immediate concern. The strains involved in this new kind of struggle nearly led to breakaways. The more traditionally minded at one point proposed to form an 'Hourly Paid Workers Shop Stewards Combine Committee'. (There may have been some discrete lobbying for this proposal by the Lucas management, but the breakaway was averted.)

As far as the Lucas management was concerned the proposals were out of this world. Their response has been confused. Faced with technical suggestions and organisational proposals which directly or indirectly would take



away a large lump of their power and authority, the management reacted with an instinctive refusal. Yet the ideas were good ones, well thought out by highly competent and also highly motivated technicians. In fact the management had decided to carry out a pilot project on the heat-pumps at Milton Keynes. Just a pilot project, mind you, no precedents to be claimed! But the stewards in the Combine were not prepared to act as an unpaid think-tank for Lucas. 'It is fundamentally a question of control' they say. They see their proposals for the new, socially-useful production as indivisible from the new social



structure of production. They see their set of demands as winnable this side of revolution, through traditional forms of rank and file activity. They also see great potential in appealing to management as fellow trade unionists! They point out with some justice that mergers, asset-stripping and shutdowns make managers redundant too, and to the fact that in recent years unions like the ASTMS have made advances in lower management in the new atmosphere of insecurity.

All this should make one think. One could react in at least three ways. Starry-eyed enthusiasm. Or 'they've not got a chance in hell'. Or 'yes, but it will only be self-managed alienation, with the profits still filling the bosses' pockets'. The fact remains that a new type of issue has arisen, in an area where revolutionaries have feared to tread. Revolutionaries

tend to see society as more polarised than the bulk of people. They tend to see certain kinds of demands as only realisable 'after the revolution'. This can work out as a variety of doctrinaire wet-blanket pessimism, since it means that proposals for 'genuine self-management' are made in terms of an indeterminate future, while the present is dealt with in terms of critiques of Wedgie Benn type co-ops, Swedish 'worker participation', etc. The effect can be depressing. Yet historically there have been several examples where the immediate and the utopian were combined in an agitational proposal, in a libertarian

way. Two examples: At the end of World War I coal miners in South Wales were seriously considering bankrupting coal owners by 'economic' strikes and taking over the mines at knock down prices and running them as co-operatives. In 1902 the French syndicalist CGT sent out a circular asking its constituent sections to send in detailed proposals as to how they would run their industries after the revolution. This was also intended to guide day by day activity 'in the right direction'. The fact that proposals in the above tradition are re-emerging from the base (the Combine is not officially recognised by either unions or management) should be taken as most encouraging and openly welcomed. In the last decades workers have tried to preserve jobs. The Lucas workers want this, for sure, but they also want to transform work and to put management out of a job.

Of course there are things on the debit side. So far this development has very largely concerned the stewards. They seem to be solidly backed as individuals on the shop floor, but it is not at all clear how much their proposals are supported or understood there. Anyway, self-management is about everybody acting, not some leading and some following. The transformation of these shop floor relationships is only elliptically thought of. Although confidence is a good thing, misplaced confidence, based on hopes of and assumptions about 'the left' in the Labour Party and the unions, can only be harmful to self-management. The battle can be re-defined in theory but only resolved in practice. And by their action the Lucas stewards have shown that it is not a question of whether workers can manage production, but of how they will fight to get there. We are entering a time when workers will increasingly seek not only to control wages and conditions but also what is made and how it is made. Such initiatives will repay scrupulous examination.

#### PORTUGAL : THE IMPOSSIBLE REVOLUTION ?

by Phil Mailer (£2.25 + postage)

Sales are going reasonably well. There have been reviews in TIME OUT (April 15-21, 1977), LEEDS OTHER PAPER (April 16, 1977), NEW SOCIETY (April 21, 1977), FEPYS (April 28, 1977), THE SUNDAY TIMES (May 1, 1977) FREEDOM (May 28, 1977) and UNDERCURRENTS (no.22, June-July 1977).

Reviews available on request. The trad left have ignored the book, probably because it doesn't call for the creation of yet one more vanguard party. We ask all our readers and supporters to make sure their local district, community or university library has a hardback copy (£5.00 + postage).



# LISTEN, PSYCHIATRIST

Revolutionaries are often faced with 'scientific', psychological objections to revolution. These are aimed as much at the revolutionary as at what he or she is saying. The 'argument' usually goes like this: 'your ideas about a new society are a cloak for hidden motives. They are a projection of unmentioned desires. They are a vehicle for your lust for power'. Or: 'your vision is an infantile day-dream: an escape mechanism which allows to live in two worlds at once. It is all just imaginary compensation'.

One could retaliate: 'and what of the motives - conscious or unconscious - leading to the conformism of psychiatrists'. But playing shuttle-cock with the problem won't make it go away. The question of self-knowledge is a real one: why are we revolutionaries? Everyone needs insight here, for a revolution embedded in unconscious urges could only re-enact, yet again, the incoherence of preceding history. It would remain dominated by obscure forces which would ultimately impose upon it their own finality and their own logic.

Why men and women are revolutionaries is by definition a highly subjective matter. Here is just one personal statement.(1) The author hopes it won't be pointless if it helps a single reader 'see more clearly into another human being - even if only into his (Cardan's) illusions and errors', and thereby more deeply into himself or herself.

...I wish, and I feel the need to live in a society other than the one around me. Like most people I can live in this one and adapt myself to it - I am, anyway, existing in it. However critically I look at myself, neither my capacity for adaptation nor my responses to reality seem to me below the sociological average. I don't ask for immortality, ubiquity or omniscience. I don't ask that society 'give me happiness'. I know that happiness isn't something that could be dished out at the local Social Security office, or by the local Workers Council. If such a thing exists,

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(1) P. Cardan, in 'Racines subjectives du projet révolutionnaire', Socialisme ou Barbarie No.38 (October-December 1964).